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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MEXICO 000990

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: MEXICO'S PRD PLAGUED AGAIN BY INTERNAL DISPUTES IN  
MIDTERM CANDIDATE SELECTIONS

REF: MEXICO 0603

Classified By: Pol MinCouns Charles V. Barclay. Reasons: 1.4 (b and d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Mexico's Democratic Revolution Party (PRD) plunged into internal discord once again, this time over the selection of candidates over the past two weeks for upcoming midterm elections. Both internal elections in select areas of the country and selections by the National Executive Council for the rest of the party's slate of legislative candidates were tarnished by allegations of voting irregularities, favoritism and broken promises. The movement of former party standard bearer Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador has yet to coalesce into a viable alternative, and supporters of Mexico City Mayor Marcel Ebrard did not fare well. PRD Party President Jesus Ortega tried to minimize the negative impact of the selection process, but the back to back spectacles most likely further damaged electoral prospects of the PRD come July. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Bitter infighting that undermined Mexico's Democratic Revolution Party (PRD) most of last year erupted again during internal elections March 15 in Zacatecas, the State of Mexico and Mexico City. The elections were held to identify the party's candidates for 53 federal deputy slots and other candidates including mayors, borough chief positions in Mexico City, and members of local assemblies. Allegations included burned ballots, ballot box theft, vote buying, inflated voting lists and out-of-state voters. The two main factions, the moderate New Left and radical United Left, traded bitter accusations against each other. One interesting outcome of the process: supporters of Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO) and the National Democratic Left (IDN) represented by party power broker Rene Bejarano fared better in Mexico City than candidates who supported Mayor Marcel Ebrard. PRD President Jesus Ortega tried to put his best face forward, minimizing the turmoil and characterizing the races as legitimate, but the headlines showed once again a party in disarray.

¶3. (SBU) On the heels of primaries in select areas, the National Executive Council of the PRD then released March 30 its plurinominal choices, as well as the selection of the remainder of its district candidates after a fractious decision-making process the preceding weekend. 200 of the 500 seats in the Chamber of Deputies in the July 5 midterm elections are allotted via a proportional representation system known as the "plurinominal". Recognition that the PRD would not likely get more than 20 percent of the vote set off

an internal struggle to decide the first 40 places on the ticket -- those most likely to be filled. Former national PRD leader Leonel Cota (displaced during last year's acrimonious leadership battles) renounced his candidacy and threatened to leave the party, accusing Ortega of breaking a promise to put him first on the list. Cota and others also complained that current party leadership skipped over United Left contenders in favor of outsiders, engaged in nepotism and rewarded renegade Worker Party (PT) members who switched allegiances in recent weeks. Despite the noisy acrimony, Ortega claimed the worst was behind the party and dismissed the claims of nepotism, saying the selection process worked better than the disputed internal elections the week earlier.

14. (C) Comment: Problems in both the election and selection of PRD candidates for the midterm elections came as no surprise. Last year, allegations of fraud in the election for PRD president resulted in a protracted dispute that nearly split the party. All party factions are likely to suffer this time around, particularly as they fight for the allegiances of smaller party members. PRD insider Marycarmen Soria told Poloff that Ortega's quest to woo members from Convergencia and PT to PRD ranks in return for favored positions at the expense of party loyalists would cost the party as newcomers vie with longtime members. AMLO seems to be faring no better in his quasi-independent status. He currently is splitting his support among PRD candidates in Mexico City and Morelos, while pitching for Convergencia and PT candidates in Veracruz, Chiapas and Oaxaca. The strategy has dissipated his energy and resources, say observers. Noisy debate within the party may have prevented

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the PRD from picking up some of the voters that the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) evidently has lost in recent weeks. The PRD selection process has only further undermined voter confidence in the PRD and its prospects in the July midterm elections. End Comment.

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